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Hiroshima, Ninevah, & Los Alamos

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

This week, to commemorate the 63rd anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, hundreds of us converged on Los Alamos, New Mexico, birthplace of the bomb, and did what some may think strange. Taking a page from the book of Jonah, we sat in sackcloth and ashes and repented of the mortal sin of war and nuclear weapons. Along Trinity Drive we sat in silence, our hearts begging the God of peace for the gift of nuclear disarmament.

You might think it strange that people resort to sackcloth and ashes. But in a town where thousands of people build and perfect weapons of mass destruction, in a world of war, executions, poverty, starvation, nuclear weapons, and global warming, our gesture was an eminently sane thing to do.

We've been doing it for several years now. This year, Sr. Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*, joined us and urged us on. She called on New Mexico to abolish the death penalty, and also to abolish nuclear weapons, which imprison us all on a kind of global nuclear death row. We embraced her exhortation and together we prayed, sang, shared and lifted up a fresh vision of peace.

To proclaim a fresh vision requires retiring the old, especially as the old vision espouses dangerous myths and lies. For instance, we know now from historians such as Gar Alperovitz, that winning World War II did not require our dropping the atomic bomb, that Japan was moving toward surrender already. The United States proceeded merely to demonstrate to the Soviets our militarily superiority. The war was a

secondary issue. In bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the United States maneuvered for a head start in the post-war arms race.

The myths and lies no longer hold. Anyone with a shred of sanity sees that building and maintaining weapons of mass destruction, and threatening to use them, is sinful, immoral and evil -- plain and simple. Such is the judgment of every major religious group.

It is illogical, inconsistent and hypocritical for us to bristle with indignation as other nations -- such as Iraq and Iran -- show interest in developing nuclear weapons while we continue to build and maintain them by the thousands.

Such were the notions expressed by our signs and banners, our sackcloth and ashes, our humble prayer and plea. It's immoral to maintain a wasteful, hazardous, expensive nuclear arsenal, instruments of genocide.

The billions upon billions of dollars should be used instead for food for the hungry, homes for the homeless, schools, jobs and universal healthcare. With the extra billions, we could meet our pledge to fight global poverty and disease, and unleash the prodigious mental power at Los Alamos to tackle the thorny problems of restoring the planet. The problems of renewable energy and radioactive landfills come to mind.

The age of nuclear weapons is coming to an end -- as is the age of oil. We can no longer afford obsolete weapons and antiquated thinking, much less risk another Hiroshima.

Our country and our world are rapidly changing, whether we like it or not, so we need to pursue a new vision of nonviolence, a new world without war, poverty, executions, hunger, corporate greed, global warming or nuclear weapons.

That's what we prayed for at Los Alamos in our sackcloth and ashes. We mournfully remembered Hiroshima, and when one does that it, necessarily involves envisioning a day when nuclear weapons no longer exist.

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John Dear's autobiography *A Persistent Peace* (440 pages, with a foreword by Martin Sheen) was released this week by Loyola Press and is available from www.amazon.com. For further information, see: www.persistentpeace.com and www.johndear.org

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